

# State Representative Mary Lou Dickerson

## Farewell to a great leader

On the 2008 session's last day, the House and Senate united to pay tribute to a great person and leader. Our own Helen Sommers is retiring in January after 36 years of outstanding service to our 36<sup>th</sup> District and our state.

Democrats and Republicans rose one by one to honor and say farewell to a leader whose integrity, inner strength and willingness to say "No," when necessary, made her the greatest budget Chair in state history. When faced with complaints for her sharp spending cuts to balance the budget, Helen would shrug it off with the comment, "What's another stripe to a tiger?" (That's why she is holding a tiger in the picture).

Our district and state will sorely miss Helen's smile, poise and personal wisdom. But her legacy will benefit us for generations—in the colleges and investments she championed, in the fiscal responsibility she instilled, and in the hearts of the leaders she inspired.



*Yours truly with Rep. Helen Sommers  
and Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles on the  
last day of the 2008 session.*

State Representative  
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2008  
Legislative Wrap-up

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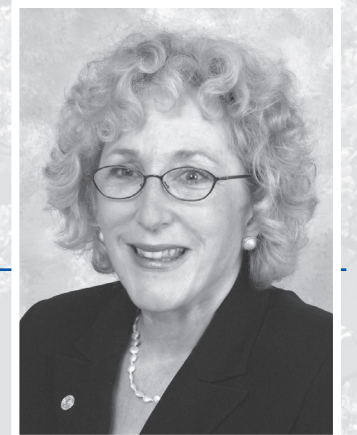
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# State Representative Mary Lou Dickerson



36th Legislative District

Dear Friends,

This year's short 60-day session flew by! I'm happy to report that I am already home and at work in our Ballard district office.

It was a frugal but productive session. Our state is doing very well compared to the rest of the nation, but concerns about the national economy led to a tight rein on spending. Our \$291 million supplemental budget is less than one percent of our overall budget, because we wanted strong reserves that save over \$850 million for future needs. The good news is that our limited spending will achieve a great deal through smart investments in education and other priorities.

Since this is my last newsletter of the year, let me say again that I'm happy and proud to represent the best legislative district in the state! I also hope you'll remember that I serve you all year round; so don't hesitate to give me a call to share ideas, ask a question or suggest a new state law or policy. I'd love to hear from you. Let's keep in touch!

Sincerely,

*Mary Lou*

Mary Lou

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## Protecting kids from toxic toys

Too many toys and children's products contain dangerous levels of toxic substances—especially lead, cadmium and phthalates—that can reduce IQs and harm growing brains and bodies. My previous newsletter detailed the

dangers. I worked with pediatricians, nurses, parents and the Washington Toxics Coalition all session long to convince lawmakers that we need a state law to protect kids against toxic children's products.

We won! Despite a high-priced lobbying campaign that tried to obscure the risks to kids from toxic toys, Democratic and Republican lawmakers united to give overwhelming support to the Children's Safe Products Act. The vote in the House was 92-2!



Moms, dads and a 20-foot rubber duck came to Olympia to support my Children's Safe Products Act.

Our new law will prohibit manufacturers from selling children's products that contain unsafe levels of lead, cadmium, or phthalates. It also directs the Department of Ecology to identify other substances that are potentially risky to children, and requires manufacturers to notify the state when products contain these risky substances.

We worked very hard to address the concerns of toy

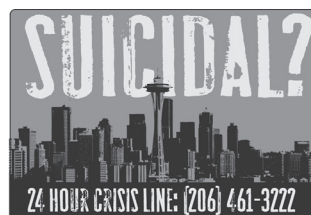
stores when we drafted the law, which will take effect in July, 2009. The result is a "win win" – a law that protects the health of children and the rights of parents without harming retailers like Archie McPhee. I'm proud the Children's Safe Products Act will make Washington the national leader on toy safety.

## Aurora Bridge suicide prevention

it the second deadliest "suicide bridge" in the USA, right behind San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. Over half of the victims fall to pavement and busy intersections below, seriously impacting the people living and working below the bridge.

Local citizens and community leaders have worked for years to make the bridge safer, and I've used my role on the House Transportation Committee to advocate for solutions. This year, our efforts achieved a long-standing goal: we secured \$7.3 million in the supplemental transportation budget for a suicide prevention fence on the Aurora Bridge. Design work should start this spring. Construction could start as early as next summer. Lives will be saved for decades to come.

A hearty salute to FRIENDS (**F**Remont **I**ndividuals & **E**mployees **N**onprofit to **D**ecrease **S**uicides) for working so hard to make the Aurora Bridge safer.



An Aurora Bridge sign

## Supporting our schools

The 2008 budget sends nearly \$3.3 million additional dollars to Seattle schools. Much of this funding (about \$2.7 million) is to improve teacher salaries—because, next to parents, good teachers are the #1 factor in determining a good education. But Seattle schools will also gain from budget increases for school equipment and supplies (about \$280,000) and support for school libraries (\$179,000). *Note: these numbers are the best estimates as of March 13. Allocation estimates may change a little over time.*

Parents and teachers like changes made this year to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Elementary and middle school tests, except writing, will be shorter and the high school math test will be replaced with end-of-course assessments.

We also took good steps to improve career and technical education in schools across the state—and created a \$100 million School Construction and Skill Centers account to help school districts build needed facilities.



## Community Schools: A beautiful idea

children and families and foster civic involvement. But did you know the PNA, which is headquartered in a former elementary school, also helped inspire a terrific new program to convert surplus schools into community facilities?

The 2008 Capital Budget includes \$4.5 million to create a "Community Schools" grant program to acquire and renovate surplus schools for use as community centers. I'm very optimistic the PNA will be among the first to receive a grant. I also hope that in the future the program will help us make good use of the former Crown Hill and Webster schools. Community Schools grants are a *great* taxpayer-friendly way to create needed neighborhood centers. Thank you PNA for helping to inspire this excellent new program!



We secured \$70,000 for the Hazel Heights P-Patch and Community Garden (LCP)

Even with the modest overall size of our 2008 supplemental budget, we were able to build on last year's outstanding year for education by adding \$101 million for public schools and making several important policy changes.

Many people know the Phinney Neighborhood Association (PNA) is a vital part of our Phinney/Greenwood neighborhood that offers many good programs to connect neighbors, help

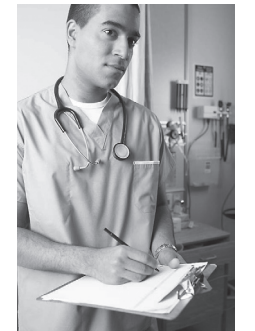


## Working for affordable health insurance

ance in what is called the "individual market." These premiums have skyrocketed as much as 20 percent a year—partly because the Insurance Commissioner was powerless to reject unjustified premium increases.

We gave the Insurance Commissioner the power to review proposed premium increases in the individual market *and to reject unreasonable premium hikes*. This law will give needed protection to over 200,000 Washingtonians.

We also fine-tuned plans for a new Health Insurance Partnership to help small businesses offer health coverage. Employers will decide what they want to contribute to employee health coverage. Employees will be able to use pre-tax dollars to pay their share of premiums, and low-income employees will be able to get help from the state with their share of premium costs. This exciting public-private partnership will begin operating in 2009.



Soaring health insurance premiums are hurting everyone, especially people who buy their health insur-

## January hopes become March realities

I was a little worried that the 2008 goals I outlined in my January newsletter were too optimistic for a short 60-day session. But in the end, we achieved nearly all of them! I've already mentioned the success of the Children's Safe Products Act and insurance reforms I advocated. Here's a quick look at what happened on other goals I mentioned in January.

✓ **Helping the homeless** – We greatly increased support for low-income housing and services to reduce homelessness. I'm especially pleased we added \$6 million to enable the Washington Families Fund to save thousands more families from homelessness. This proven program uses private matching dollars from the Gates Foundation and other organizations to double (or more!) the value of our investments.

✓ **Condo conversion** – To prevent displaced families from becoming homeless, we passed a good law that requires 120 days notice prior to a condo conversion; prohibits disruptive construction during the notice period; and allows local governments to require reasonable relocation assistance from developers.

✓ **Cell-phone privacy** – A new law prohibits companies from knowingly publishing personal cell-phone numbers in public directories without the customer's permission.

✓ **Punishing mortgage fraud** – We enacted severe penalties against con artists who trick people into transferring home ownership rights through fraudulent foreclosure rescues—making that and other deceptive mortgage practices a class B felony.

✓ **Spyware crimes** – We strengthened consumer protection laws to increase prosecutions of people who install or facilitate computer spyware.

We didn't achieve *every* goal mentioned in my earlier newsletter: We *still* need to do more to protect elderly adults from abuse or neglect and we still need to ensure that gun-licensing authorities are notified when a person is involuntarily committed for a mental disorder. But for a 60-day session, we accomplished quite a bit!